

ality of the other. He wished to call their whole attention to that single fact; and not only to that, but to a thousand others, which, like that, would make them burn to take terrible vengeance on the mercenary invaders of their soil. He called upon them to look upon their country. What met their sight? Its possessions wrested away; its dignity insulted; its fair fields ravaged; its citizens slaughtered; its hearths and homes made desolate. Others had gone forth to vindicate these wrongs, but they had fallen; and now their blood, which had drenched the fields of Palo Alto, Resaca de la Palma, and Monterey, called on them, their brethren, with an eloquence that must reach their hearts, to avenge their death. He reminded them, that they had crossed deserts, had suffered hunger, and thirst, and fatigue, without a murmur. Long and weary had been their march; but now they should be rewarded with repose, and the enjoyment of the abundance which filled the ample granaries of the murderers of their brethren. He concluded by saying, that we were but a handful, and at his mercy; that he had magnanimously offered to spare our lives, and even to treat us with consideration; but that

we had vain-gloriously rejected his clemency, leaving, as the only alternative, our utter extermination, without pity or quarter.\*

This address was received with loud cries of "*Viva Santana!*" "*Viva la Republica!*" "*Libertad o Muerte!*"—distinctly heard in our lines. After the shouting had ceased, Santa Anna's own magnificent band commenced playing; and, as the gentle breeze swept down the Pass toward us, each delicious strain seemed to float upon it, mellowed by distance, yet distinct and inexpressibly sweet. For over half an hour it continued to delight our "barbarian ears" with the exquisitely beautiful airs of the sunny south. When it had finished, and the last faint echo had sunk to rest, silence the most profound fell over the two armies like a pall. The huge mountains on each side reared their craggy heads high into the darkness above, and the Pass itself seemed to lie between them in deep gloom and utter solitude. No one could realize that there were so many thousands of human beings gathered together in that narrow gorge. And it was a dreadful reflection,

\* The substance of this address was repeated to some of our officers by Mexicans who heard it.

that so many of them, now full of life, and ambition, and high aspirations; now visiting in thought their far-off homes and the dear ones there; now the objects of pride and yearning solicitude; now the centre of deep affection, of sacred love, and of long-cherished hopes,—would be stricken down in the full flush and vigor of manhood, and, ere another night should cast its dark mantle over the earth, would be numbered for ever among the things that were.

At ten o'clock in the evening, the two companies of the 1st Dragoons were ordered by General Wool to return to Buena Vista, strike our camp, pack it in wagons, and then to park these carefully in one of the hollows between the hacienda and La Angostura. This service was completed by half past one o'clock, and the whole train arranged so as to be moved at the shortest notice.

Until eleven o'clock on the evening of the 22d, the weather was quite mild; but at that hour a cold wind began to blow, and the sky, which before had been thickly overcast, became filled with dark and heavy drifts of clouds, which now and then let down slight

showers of rain, more particularly up the mountain on our left. There the men suffered extremely from the cold. They gathered together the trunks of the *yuca* and the dry stalks of the *sotol*, and built themselves fires, until at length, up the whole side of the mountain, from near the plateau to the very top, light after light was kindled; and for the whole night long each one was surrounded by a circle of shivering troops. All the rest of both armies remained in position, and slept upon their arms without fires.\*

About two o'clock in the morning of the 23d, some of our advanced piquets were attacked by those of the Mexican army, and driven in; and, between that time and day-break, the light division of General Ampudia was reinforced by 2000 infantry from the divisions of Generals Lombardini and Pacheco. Many of Ampudia's command, when it had thus been augmented, clambered along near the summit of the mountain, and succeeded in gaining elevated positions to the left and

---

\* "In our position we passed the night, which was absolutely infernal, owing to the cold, rain, and wind, which last almost amounted to a hurricane, while we had neither food nor fuel."—*Mexican Engineer's Report.*

rear of our riflemen. It was also in this quarter, at the very first dawn of day, that the battle of the 23d commenced.

General Wool, perceiving that the strength of the enemy in that direction was much greater than on the evening before, immediately detached Major Trail, of the 2d Illinois Volunteers, with another small battalion of riflemen, including Captain Conner's company of Texas Volunteers, to reinforce the command which had there engaged the enemy with much spirit, and, although contending with nearly eight to one, continued to maintain very handsomely its own part of the mountain. It was soon assisted, likewise, by Lieutenant O'Brien, who, with the 2d Indiana Volunteers, had remained at the upper edge<sup>(1)</sup> of the plateau for the night. His pieces were one 12-pounder howitzer, one 6-pounder gun, and one 4-pounder. Just at sunrise, as great numbers of Ampudia's light troops poured down into the ravine which divided their slope of the mountain from the one occupied by our riflemen, he pushed forward his howitzer, and, although the distance and elevation were very great, succeeded in throwing directly into the midst of them some six or eight spherical-

case shot, which, exploding just at the proper time, did immense execution. Up to this moment the discharge of the enemy's musketry on the side of the mountain had been incessant; but, at the bursting of the first shot, it completely ceased for several minutes, his troops being occupied in climbing still higher up and out of range. The accuracy and effect of Lieutenant O'Brien's firing on this occasion were so admirable, as to call forth the cheers of our whole line.

In the mean time, the chief of Santa Anna's staff, General Micheltorena, succeeded in planting a battery of 8-pounders at the upper termination of the elevated ridge<sup>(M)</sup> already spoken of as lying between our position and that of the enemy, from which point he had a plunging fire on the plateau. His first efforts were against the pieces under Lieutenant O'Brien, but the distance was so great, that the latter did not attempt to answer him.

While the battle was thus opened and continued by the small force on our extreme left, the rest of our troops, under the direction of General Wool, were placed in their final position to await the attack then menaced in our front. Captain Bragg's Battery, supported by

Colonel McKee's regiment, remained at the same point <sup>(N)</sup> on our extreme right, to which it had been directed to proceed the evening before. Captain Washington's Battery continued to occupy La Angostura, <sup>(B)</sup> sustained by Colonel Hardin's regiment\* in the trenches on its right, and upon the high spur on its left.

It should have been remarked, that the plateau is scalloped, on its side next the road, by three deep gorges, that run back into it. They are of unequal length; the shortest <sup>(O)</sup> being only a little in advance of the point where the high tongue of land, occupied by the 1st Illinois Volunteers, joins the upper plain; the next <sup>(P)</sup> still longer; and the third <sup>(Q)</sup> running back more than half way from the road to the mountain. The six companies † of Colonel Bissell's Second Regiment of Illinois Volunteers, which remained, were posted on the plateau opposite to the head of the middle gorge. <sup>(R)</sup>

\* That is, eight companies of it; Captain Morgan's and Captain Prentiss's companies composing a part of Major Warren's command in Saltillo.

† Two were in Saltillo, Captain Hacker's and Captain Wheeler's, — and two (besides the Texan company), Captain Lemon's and Captain Woodward's, composed the battalion sent to the mountain under Major Trail.

On their left, and a little retired, was one 12-pounder howitzer, under Lieutenant French, and on their right, and also a little in the rear, one 6-pounder gun, under Lieutenant Thomas. Both these pieces belonged to Captain Sherman's Battery, the other two, under the Captain himself and Lieutenant John F. Reynolds, remaining in reserve, as on the 22d. <sup>(S)</sup> To the right and rear of Lieutenant Thomas's gun, were the two companies of the 1st Dragoons, <sup>(T)</sup> and to the right and rear of them, and near the head of the first gorge, Major McCulloch's company of Mounted Texans. <sup>(U)</sup> Colonel Bowles's Second Regiment of Indiana Volunteers occupied the extreme left of the plateau, with Lieutenant O'Brien's three pieces on their right; there being a long interval between his guns and Lieutenant French's howitzer on the left of the regiment under Colonel Bissell. Colonel Lane's Third Regiment of Indiana Volunteers occupied the small eminence <sup>(V)</sup> in rear of Washington's Battery, while all of the Arkansas and Kentucky Mounted Volunteers, who had not been detached to fight on foot, remained in the head of the broad ravine <sup>(W)</sup> in rear of the left of the plateau.

The Mexican army was formed in three

columns of attack. The first,<sup>(x)</sup> destined to move down the road and carry the Pass of La Angostura, was composed of the Regiment of Engineers, the Twelfth Regiment, the Regiment styled "*Fijo de Mexico*," the Battalion of Puebla, and the celebrated "*Guarda Costa de Tampico*." This column was commanded by General Mora y Villamil. The second column was composed of the divisions of Generals Lombardini and Pacheco, and was destined, one division<sup>(y)</sup> to move directly across the ridge to the left of their 8-pounder battery, and the other<sup>(z)</sup> to advance up the principal ravine in front of the plateau, where both, uniting near the mountain, were to turn the left of our force upon the plateau. The troops under General Ampudia were to compose the third,<sup>(1)</sup> destined to sweep the mountain, to turn our extreme left, and then, in conjunction with the second, to fall on our rear. The first two columns had each a strong supporting force of cavalry; moreover, the 12-pounder battery and the howitzer were brought farther forward, and established within range of La Angostura, on a slight eminence,<sup>(1)</sup> close to the road, and just to the right and rear of the small hill occupied by the battalion of

Leon.<sup>(20)</sup> This battery was to assist the attack to be made by the first column. A powerful reserve,<sup>(2)</sup> commanded by General Ortega, remained on the ground occupied, on the night of the 22d, by Santa Anna's two front lines of battle.

These arrangements, on both sides, completed the preliminaries of the grand conflict. While they were in progress, our riflemen and Ampudia's force continued hotly engaged, and the enemy's battery of 8-pounders kept up a steady fire upon our troops on the left of the plateau.<sup>(1)</sup>

As General Pacheco's division had fewer difficulties to overcome than that of General Lombardini, it had moved up the ravine and gained its position before the latter had united with it. General Lombardini's division, however, had by that time passed the summit of the height where the 8-pounder battery was posted,<sup>(M)</sup> and began to descend the declivity toward the same ravine, but at a point higher up than that already occupied by General Pacheco. Both of these divisions, as has been already remarked, were supported by large bodies of dragoons and lancers; and, while Pacheco's, being in the deep ravine in front, was

concealed from view, Lombardini's was in full sight of nearly the whole of our army. And a most beautiful sight it was. The men were all in full dress, the horses were gayly caparisoned, and the arms of both cavalry and infantry shone bright as silver. Every regiment, corps, and squadron had its standards, colors, and guidons unfurled; and, while the infantry marched steadily onward with a most perfectly marked and cadenced step, the cavalry moved with the regularity and precision it would have observed in an ordinary field review.

Our lines, meanwhile, were standing quietly in position. Not a word was spoken, excepting now and then, when some subdued expression of admiration at the magnificent appearance of the enemy and the coolness with which they came forward to the combat, would involuntarily escape the lips of our brave and determined men.

It was a time never to be forgotten, that short period which intervened between the final dispositions and the moment of attack. The morning was unusually bright and clear; the sunlight seemed to cover with flashing diamonds the burnished weapons and appointments of the Mexicans; while a cool and invigorating

breeze displayed every flag, and sported with the gaudy and fluttering pennons of what appeared to be a countless forest of lances. The sharp rattle of musketry, the sullen reply of the deadly rifle, and the bugle-calls, intermingled with the shouts of those who were desperately struggling high up the mountain, came down upon the ear with an eloquent distinctness. All these circumstances, taken in connection with the roar of their cannon, and the rushing sound of the balls as they tore up the ground in the midst of us, or went screaming through the air above us, will come vividly back to the memory, until they shall be old men, who, for the first time, were standing silently there to await the rude shock of battle.

Major Mansfield, of the Engineers, having reconnoitred the movements of the enemy from an advanced point, and ascertained the presence and exact position of General Pacheco's division, came back with the intelligence; when Inspector-General Churchill rode to the left of the plateau,<sup>(L)</sup> and informed General Lane, that the enemy was then coming up, and across the main ravine in front. General Lane, at this moment, was the ranking officer

on the plateau ; as General Wool, after superintending in person the posting of all the troops and the final arrangements for battle, had a few minutes before gone down to La Angostura, to see that every thing was in readiness for repelling the first column under General Mora y Villamil, then on the march to attack that point. General Lane, therefore, immediately ordered forward Lieutenant O'Brien, with his three pieces of artillery, and the Second Regiment of Indiana Volunteers to support him. This force advanced over two hundred yards in front of all the other troops, and, having turned the head of the third gorge, was halted ; when Lieutenant O'Brien placed his section in battery, and, immediately afterwards, the column of companies displayed into line on his left, the front being changed diagonally forward towards the road.<sup>(3)</sup>

General Pacheco's infantry had, by this time, begun to ascend from the ravine, and were forming in successive lines across the narrow ridge which divides it from the gorge ; <sup>(4)</sup> his lancers still remaining behind, under cover.\* General Lane's infantry had

\* This is the time (nine o'clock, A. M.) selected to represent on the annexed Plan of the Battle the position of our

hardly completed its line, before it was opened upon by the Mexicans, then distant about two hundred yards. They were answered with promptness and great effect ; and Lieutenant O'Brien's guns, which were admirably served, swept down whole platoons of them at a discharge. The disparity between the two forces then engaged was at least ten to one in favor of the enemy ; and General Lane, in addition to the fire of the troops in his front, was nearly enfiladed by the 8-pounder battery on his left, which had now got so completely the range, that almost every shot took effect in his ranks. Notwithstanding this, he continued the unequal conflict for twenty-five minutes. During that time, the front lines of General Pacheco's division were repeatedly thrown into confusion ; the whole of the new corps of Guanajuato, which formed its advance,

---

own and the enemy's troops ; as it is considered to have been the moment when the grand conflict commenced. Colonel Davis's Mississippi Riflemen, Colonel May's Squadron of 2d Dragoons, Captain Albert Pike's Squadron of Arkansas Mounted Volunteers, and a piece of artillery under Lieutenant Kilburn, being on the march from Saltillo, were not at this exact time near enough to the field of battle to be included within the space covered by the Plan.

being either killed or dispersed. But, by his successive formations, he was enabled rapidly to supply the places of those destroyed, and to present a continuous sheet of fire. General Lane now determined to get out of the range of the battery on his left, by pushing still farther down the ridge; hoping, at the same time, to force General Pacheco back into the ravine. He, accordingly, directed Lieutenant O'Brien to limber up, and advance some fifty or sixty yards farther to the right and front; which being promptly done, the pieces were again placed in battery and commenced the slaughter.

At this time, General Lane, being himself on the left of the 2d Indiana Volunteers, which were also to move forward and sustain Lieutenant O'Brien, had the mortification to see the companies breaking off, one by one, from the right, and retreating in great confusion; Colonel Bowles, who commanded the regiment, having given, without his authority or knowledge, the order, "*Cease firing, and retreat!*" Nothing could have been more unfortunate. For, if General Lane's purpose had been promptly responded to by this regiment, which up to that moment had behaved

with great gallantry, it is more than probable that General Pacheco's division would have been cut up in time to allow us to engage with our other and fresh troops that of General Lombardini, before he could have crossed the ravine above and gained the plateau. If, instead of retreating, these troops had pressed vigorously forward, the success of the day would have been more complete; and there cannot be a doubt but that hundreds of valuable lives would have been spared, which were afterwards sacrificed to regain the many and great advantages we lost in consequence of this, to say the least, ill-timed order.\* Had it not been given, the patriotic state of Indiana, by a single effort of one of her regiments, would have been covered with glory.†

\* It is but justice to state, that, among officers of long experience, the belief is entertained, that the prime fault was one of rashness, and want of judgment, in placing this force in a position, which, they contend, neither this nor any other regiment could have maintained, — a position, moreover, which, they assert, it was not necessary to hold as one upon which others depended; and that General Lane should be made to bear a part of the odium which the regiment could not escape. Other officers of equal experience express the contrary opinion, as set forth in the text.

† "About 3000 infantry, and a supporting force of caval-



General Lane and his staff endeavored, by every possible inducement, to rally the men again, but all without avail. They precipitately fled, leaving the intrepid O'Brien, and his gallant subordinate, Lieutenant Bryan, entirely without support. For some minutes they held on to their position, single-handed; their pieces, charged with two canisters at a time, sending scores on scores of the enemy into eternity. The Mexicans, however, maintained their ground with great spirit, and soon cut up Lieutenant O'Brien's men and horses to such a degree, that, when he was finally pressed upon by the whole of the immense force arrayed against him, he was compelled reluctantly to limber up two of his guns, and retire from the point he had so nobly defended. He was obliged to leave the other piece, — the 4-pounder, — in the

---

ry, commanded by General Pacheco, moved up to take this height, and at nine a heavy fire was opened. The cavalry charged at the same moment. [*Not the fact.*] Many of our corps acted badly, but much havoc, nevertheless, was made among the enemy, and the heights were carried by force of arms. We lost many men, and the new corps of Guanajuato was dispersed. IF, AT THAT JUNCTURE, WE HAD BEEN ATTACKED WITH VIGOR, WE SHOULD PROBABLY HAVE BEEN DEFEATED." — *Mexican Engineer's Report.*

hands of the enemy; not, however, until every man and horse belonging to it had been either killed or disabled.

General Pacheco immediately followed up the advantage he had purchased at so much cost; his cavalry advanced from its cover, and pressed forward on the right of his infantry; while General Lombardini succeeded, at the same time, in crossing the ravine and uniting with him. The centre column was then entire, and so formidable in numbers as to appear completely irresistible.

The 2d Illinois Volunteers, under Colonel Bissell,<sup>(B)</sup> — the squadron of 1st Dragoons, under Captain Steen,<sup>(T)</sup> — and the pieces of Lieutenants Thomas and French, — had retained their position, and received a desultory fire from a part of General Pacheco's infantry, which, during the conflict with General Lane, had succeeded in getting shelter in the third gorge. These troops were ordered to advance to a closer point just before the Indiana regiment gave way. Soon after they had gained it, and had come handsomely into action, the enemy's centre column was complete, and, being relieved from the resistance of General Lane's force, now concentrated its whole fire

upon them. It was returned with deliberation and great effect. Every discharge of Thomas's and French's pieces caused their immense masses to reel and waver, as the balls, opening a wide and bloody path, went tearing through them; while the rapid musketry of the gallant troops of Illinois poured a storm of lead into their serried ranks, which literally strewed the ground with the dead and dying.

It being impossible for our handful of regular cavalry, then on the field, to gain any decided advantage by charging into such an overwhelming force, where, in one moment, it would have been completely destroyed, Captain Steen was soon directed to remove it from its perilous situation back nearly to the ravine in rear. The dragoons had hardly fallen back, and McCulloch's mounted Texans<sup>(1)</sup> taken cover in the head of the first gorge, before the enemy, having continued to advance notwithstanding his severe losses, had passed with a large portion of his troops between the left of the Illinoisians and the mountain;<sup>(2)</sup> so that that regiment, — or rather the six companies of it, — and the two pieces from Sherman's battery, were soon receiving a fire in front, on their left flank, and from their left and rear, at the same moment.

Inspector-General Churchill, who remained with Colonel Bissell, seemed at this time to be one of the chosen marks for the Mexican sharpshooters; his horse being struck by three bullets in succession, and his reins cut in two by a fourth. The Illinois troops had ever been the particular favorites of that gallant veteran; and he determined to stand by them personally, and see whether his predilections were not based upon good grounds. His pride in them was fully gratified at beholding the unflinching firmness with which they maintained their position against such an immense host. At length, perceiving the danger they were in of being completely surrounded, he ordered Colonel Bissell to fall back to a point near the ravine, to prevent that issue. As regularly as if on drill, Colonel Bissell, having directed the signal, "Cease firing," to be made, gave the command, "*Face to the rear! Battalion, about FACE! Battalion, forward, MARCH!*" which was executed until the danger of being outflanked was past, when again, at the command to halt, given by Inspector-General Churchill, who had walked his horse slowly in front of the retiring regiment, these cool and deter-

mined men stopped, faced about, and resumed the fire with a promptness and precision which would have done credit to any troops in the service; and all under a murderous storm of bullets from the enemy. Simple justice to these brave fellows renders it necessary that all the details of their conduct on this occasion should be given. Besides, it is an evidence of the manner in which troops, in their first battle, *can* behave, when they have been properly instructed and carefully disciplined. It is a sufficient encomium on them to say, that they had never before been under fire, and that during the short time they had been engaged (twenty minutes), they had lost, in killed and wounded, no less than eighty, including officers and men. Lieutenants Thomas and French, — the latter wounded, — had likewise been obliged to fall back; but they soon came into battery again, and, in conjunction with Colonel Bissell's regiment, commenced a well-directed fire at the enemy's left flank, as he endeavored to cross the plateau and gain our rear.

Again, in justice to those who thus manfully disputed the ground, inch by inch, against such odds, it is necessary, yet mortifying, to

state, that four companies of the Arkansas Volunteers,<sup>(5)</sup> which had been dismounted and ordered to the plateau a few minutes before the action began, retired almost at the first fire, and became so much dispersed, that, as companies, they were not heard of again during the battle. But a few spirited individuals of the number joined their own and other regiments, and, for the whole day, nobly discharged their duty.\*

At this moment, the thunder of the battery below, at La Angostura, gave evidence that the first column of the enemy, under General Mora y Villamil, had got within its range. The rapidity of the firing, and the roar of the cannon, which caused the old mountains to groan

\* It is contended that these troops gave way in consequence of the falling back amongst them of Colonel Bowles's regiment.\* That, as individuals, they were as brave as any men in the world, cannot be doubted; but their being entirely without discipline, or any habit of strict military obedience, and their consequent want of confidence in their leaders and in each other, may be fairly assigned as the principal reasons for their precipitate retreat.

\* In this supposition, an officer of high rank in the regular army, who witnessed the whole of the operations, does not concur; because, he says, the Indiana regiment did not, in its flight, pass near these four companies of Arkansas Volunteers.